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An Implied Soviet Threat Spurred U.S. Forces' Alert

*Brezhnev Note on Acting Alone to Back
Mideast Cease-Fire Led to Test of Wills
Oct. 24-25, Washington Aides Say*

CPYRGHT

By DAVID BINDER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 20—The Soviet note that led to a precautionary alert of United States forces around the world on the night of Oct. 24 carried an implied threat rather than an actual threat of the dispatch of Soviet troops to the Suez war zone.

"We strongly urge that we both send forces to enforce the cease-fire and, if you do not, we may be obliged to consider acting alone," the Soviet note said, according to two officials who have read it.

A reconstruction of the cascading events of that night—many of which remain masked in secrecy—shows that the note from the Soviet leader, Leonid I. Brezhnev, to President Nixon and the alert ordered by the Nixon Administration were only two of a series of firm signals exchanged in a complicated test of wills over the Middle East.

The exchanges lasted more than 12 hours, according to interviews with United States officials and Soviet, Israeli and European diplomats, but the crucial exchange—delivery of the Brezhnev note and the calling of the alert—took place in less than an hour, approximately between 10:40 and 11:30 P.M.

The alert was put into effect by 2:30 A.M. Oct. 25, officials said, and formally authorized by President Nixon half an hour later.

Only hours before the arrival of the Brezhnev note, the Nixon Administration had rejected two earlier plans for a joint United States-Soviet expeditionary force to enforce peace on the Suez front.

The first had come from President Anwar el-Sadat of Egypt in a message read over the Cairo radio at about 3 P.M. on Oct. 24. The next, in the form of a message from Mr. Brezhnev, had been delivered at about 8 P.M. to Secretary of State Kissinger by Ambassador Anatoly F. Dobrynin.

The crisis that Mr. Kissinger faced had been building up for several days.

On Oct. 16, Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin, on a hasty visit to Egypt, discovered that the Egyptian Army, in contrast with President Sadat's boasts, was near a state of collapse. In addition, the Egyptian III Corps, on the east bank of the Suez Canal opposite the city of Suez, faced encirclement by the Israelis as a result of the

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Israeli crossing to the western bank early that morning.

Mr. Kosygin returned to Moscow Oct. 19 urging that the Soviet Government press for an immediate cease-fire in the Middle East war, which was then in its 14th day. Mr. Brezhnev thereupon invited President Nixon to send Mr. Kissinger to Moscow, and the Secretary arrived the next day.

In sessions Oct. 20 and 21 Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Brezhnev reached a compromise in which Moscow won its point that no time could be lost in achieving a cease-fire, while the Americans won their point of that the cease-fire must be linked to negotiations between the Arabs and Israelis.

The joint cease-fire proposal they agreed upon was adopted by the United Nations Security Council early Oct. 22, and the truce in place officially went into effect about 12 hours later.

Mr. Kissinger stopped in Israel on that day on his way

home from Moscow. Four hours after he had left, Israeli forces went on to complete their encirclement of the Egyptian 1st Corps, an action he heard about later, reportedly with great dismay and a sense of betrayal.

While the Russians were said to have been outraged at what they regarded as a breach of their Oct. 21 understanding with the Americans, they also saw it as an opportunity to establish a large Soviet presence in the Middle East and they reportedly solicited President Sadat's Oct. 24 call for United States and Soviet troops.

A United States official familiar with the event said the original Brezhnev proposal on Oct. 24 for a joint United States-Soviet force for the Middle East made Mr. Kissinger apprehensive that tougher moments were ahead.

Mr. Kissinger was also getting what he later described as "puzzling" reports from the United Nations. There the Soviet representative, Yakov A. Malik, had shifted suddenly

from demanding a mere reaffirmation of the cease-fire resolution of Oct. 22—a reaffirmation was voted Oct. 23—and the new truce went into effect Oct. 24—to a resolution authorizing an expeditionary force for the Suez region, to a resolution authorizing a United States-Soviet expeditionary force.

The intelligence community, drawing principally on electronic surveillance of Soviet land, sea and air forces, had already noted the presence of seven landing craft and two ships with troop helicopters in eastern Mediterranean waters.

The landing craft had been there before, "milling around," as one intelligence official put it, recalling that a week before there had been eight landing craft in the eastern Mediterranean.

Troop Standby Monitored

Electronic surveillance had also monitored signals putting seven divisions of Soviet airborne troops — about 49,000 men — on a standby alert. One division had been placed on a higher level of alert during the day, making it ready to move out on call.

But, the intelligence official observed, there had been Soviet alerts before during the Middle East conflict, which began Oct. 6, and more Soviet landing craft in the region. So the activities of Soviet forces on Oct. 24 by themselves had caused no undue alarm at the Defense Department, one of the officials said.

Still the Soviet Air Force had pulled most of its large transports back from Damascus and Cairo to their home bases that day and some Pentagon official interpreted this as a sign that Moscow might use them to take Soviet troops, rather than So-

viet weapons, to the Suez battle zone.

When the second Brezhnev note came at about 10:40 P.M. warning that the Soviet Union "may be obliged to consider acting alone," the responsible American officials—principally Secretary Kissinger and Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger—put that together with the electronic intelligence evidence and concluded that the Soviet Union was determined to put troops in the Middle East.

Suggestion to President

Describing the situation later, one of the Cabinet officials involved in the decision-making said of the second note and the intelligence estimates, "Either one, apart, we could have ignored."

Ambassador Dobrynin left the second note with Mr. Kissinger without obtaining a reply.

The Secretary of State immediately telephoned President Nixon, who was in his upper floor living quarters in the White House and suggested the United States response should be military as well as political, Mr. Nixon concurred.

This was the genesis of the United States alert.

President Nixon remained in charge throughout, his aides say, but he was also remote, staying the entire night in his White House apartment and receiving the telephone messages of Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger. Mr. Nixon empowered them to manage the crisis on their own, the Cabinet official said, leaving them to conceive and carry out the various moves.

Mr. Kissinger convened a meeting of what Mr. Schles-

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inger later termed "the abbreviated National Security Council" in the austere, map-filled Situation Room in the White House basement.

It was abbreviated in part because the chairman of what had been a six-man panel, President Nixon, was upstairs. Mr. Kissinger was there in his dual capacity as Secretary of State and the President's assistant for national security affairs.

Another chair was empty because Spiro T. Agnew had resigned, and there was no director of the Office of Emergency Preparedness since George A. Lincoln had retired 14 months before.

"Officially the meeting consisted of Kissinger, Kissinger and Schlesinger," a council aide commented.

Attending as the intelligence adviser was William E. Colby, Director of Central Intelligence, whose agency had played a major role in handling the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and was now on the sidelines. Mr. Colby had been called in belatedly.

The C.I.A. was familiar with the electronic intelligence obtained by its powerful sister agency, the National Security Agency, but it was not apprised of the Soviet notes until Mr. Colby arrived at the White House.

Haig's Role Described

Attending as the military adviser was Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Mr. Schlesinger had been told of the second Soviet note by Alexander M. Haig Jr., chief of the White House staff. He, in turn, called Admiral Moorer. General Haig functioned more as a go-between than as a member of the decision-making group, aides said.

The abbreviated National

Security Council met at about 11 P.M., and Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Schlesinger swiftly agreed on a modified alert as the United States military response designed to persuade the Soviet Union against acting alone.

The technical term for the alert is Defense Condition 3, explained by a Pentagon official as "an order to stand by for further orders that may come." It is an order any area commander can issue without higher authority if he feels his forces may be threatened.

Mr. Schlesinger is said to have issued it at 11:30 P.M., and it was passed to the service chiefs by Admiral Moorer.

While the service chiefs were aware of the movements of Soviet military units, they were said to be so surprised by the diplomatic messages that they sent an aide to the C.I.A. and the State Department to seek further word on Soviet intentions. He apparently returned empty-handed.

The Washington order alerted most but not all United States forces. The Coast Guard, with its vital air-sea rescue system, was not brought in until 12 hours later. Strategic Air Command tanker planes hovering along the United States-to-Israel airlift route were left in their Middle Atlantic patterns rather than sent north for possible fueling of long-range B-52 bombers.

Mr. Schlesinger returned to the Pentagon about 1:30 A.M. to bolster the alert by ordering the aircraft carrier John F. Kennedy from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean with her A-4 fighter-bombers and telling the 15,000-man 82d Airborne Division at Fort Bragg, N. C., to get ready to board transport craft.

Asked if the Soviet Union had been notified of the alert,

a United States official said: "No, the alert itself was a signal which we knew they would get through their own electronic intelligence."

Heightened United States military activity could clearly be discerned through the amount and nature of the radio traffic, it was said.

Mr. Kissinger was busy, meanwhile, on the diplomatic front. He conferred repeatedly from the outset of the American-Soviet exchanges with Israel's Ambassador, Simcha Dinitz, advising him of Soviet and United States moves.

About 1 A.M. he told the British Ambassador, the Earl of Cromer, of the note and the alert. Other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were informed through the mechanism of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, which was advised of the alert by the Defense Department about 2 A.M. Pentagon officials say the news went out to the alliance capitals much later because of a foul-up in the Brussels communication machinery.

In retrospect, however, associates of Mr. Kissinger acknowledge that the crisis-managers "botched" the job of promptly informing United States allies on the night's actions.

"We could have called up all the top allies," said a United States official. "But it might have meant delaying the alert."

Mr. Kissinger was also in touch with the United States delegate to the United Nations, John A. Scali, who had just been through some bruising exchanges with Mr. Malik.

The Soviet delegate had accused the United States of allowing Israel to violate the cease-fire of Oct. 22 and make territorial gains.

Through Mr. Scali, Mr. Kissinger was working to get the Soviet Union to agree to a new resolution in the Security Council setting up a peace-keeping force for the disputed Suez region.

Reply to Brezhnev Drafted

Finally, Mr. Kissinger drafted a reply to the last Brezhnev note saying the United States would not tolerate a unilateral action by the Soviet Union, hoped that Moscow would not take that course, and warned that any such move would damage the cause of peace. He also called for joint action in the United Nations.

That done, according to an aide, a weary Mr. Kissinger walked upstairs and reported to President Nixon and obtained his "ratification" of the moves, including the second note to Mr. Brezhnev. It was about 3 A.M. on Oct. 25, three and a half hours after the alert had been called.

At his news conference at noon, the Secretary publicly reminded Moscow that both the Soviet Union and the United States had nuclear arsenals "capable of annihilating humanity," but that they also had "a special duty to see to it that confrontations are kept within bounds."

An hour or so later, both countries joined in the 14-to-0 vote by which the United Nations Security Council decided to establish a United Nations peace-keeping force excluding the major powers—a move that in effect brought the American-Soviet exchanges to an end.

And in those exchanges, officials noted, the hot-line teletype machine that connects Washington and Moscow was never used.

A-Arms Believed In Egypt Scud Missiles Seen Under Soviet Control

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Michael Getler
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Soviet Union probably did ship nuclear weapons into Egypt during the October Arab-Israeli war, U.S. officials now believe.

These weapons are still believed to be in Egypt, though undoubtedly under strict Russian control.

The weapons are believed to be atomic warheads for mobile, Soviet-built "Scud" missiles, also shipped to Egypt at some point either before or during the Middle East fighting.

The "Scud" missiles have a range estimated at between 160 and 180 miles, long enough to bring Israeli cities within reach of these weapons if launched from the northeastern sectors of Egypt.

During the 18-day war, which began Oct. 6, there had been unconfirmed reports that the Soviets had shipped roughly 20 of these missiles into Egypt. Then, on Nov. 2, it was reported that U.S. intelligence was virtually certain that the Soviets had in fact sent the missiles to Egypt.

At the time, it was felt that the missiles were armed with conventional, high-explosive warheads, rather than atomic devices. At a meeting with newsmen that same day, however, a senior defense official—who asked not to be identified—was questioned about the presence of nuclear warheads and said only that there was "no confirmatory evidence" at that time.

U.S. officials familiar with the situation say there is still no way to be absolutely certain about the nuclear warheads, but that there now is "some evidence that something is there" and a more widespread feeling among senior intelligence officials that nuclear weapons were shipped.

Officials say the United States detected nuclear material being carried aboard some Soviet military supply ships moving from the Black Sea into the Mediterranean.

By itself, this type of information is inconclusive because the Soviet Navy, like the U.S. Navy, carries nuclear weapons.

But at least one of these vessels reportedly did enter port in Egypt. Intelligence sources say, however, that this

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A-Arms Believed in Egypt

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vessel and possibly some other devices can detect if some material was unloaded from the ships or whether there is other evidence to support the

view that the warheads are in Egypt.

On Nov. 5, the magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology reported flatly that the Russians had sent two brigades of nuclear-armed "Scud" missiles to Egypt, and that the United States had satellite pictures to prove it.

U.S. officials say it is very difficult, if not impossible, to tell the difference between nuclear and conventional warheads from pictures—which they do not admit to having—though some of the support equipment could carry telltale signs.

These officials also say the evidence is still not as firm as the magazine article implies.

The most widely held estimate of Soviet intentions behind the missile shipments is that the Russians had to respond in some fashion to demands from Egyptian President Anwar Sadat for some more advanced offensive weaponry, and also to provide a balance to still-secret Israeli-built surface-to-surface missiles.

Despite official Israeli denials, U.S. intelligence sources say there is little doubt that Israel has developed and produced at least some of its own "Jericho" missiles, with a range estimated at about 300 miles, enough to span the Sinai and reach deep into Egypt.

Israel is also widely believed to have the makings for a number of small atomic warheads.

The appearance of the "Scud" missiles in Egypt, even at the point when it was assumed they were armed with conventional warheads, caused considerable concern within the administration and some high-level communication with the Russians. This was because the missiles represented a potentially new level of long-range warfare and because the missiles were known to be at least capable of carrying nuclear warheads.